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AN ORCHESTRA OF CIVIL RESISTANCE: PRIVILEGE, DIVERSITY AND IDENTIFICATION AMONG CROSS-BORDER ACTIVISTS IN A PALESTINIAN VILLAGE

by Andreas Hackl

Fluctuating forms of diversity have evolved as a result of cross-border interventions by civil resistance activists. Such diversity is nurtured by the inflows and outflows of individuals from very different backgrounds on a local stage of action. Discussing civil resistance as an arena in which such fluctuating diversity produces multi-layered patterns of identification, this paper looks at Israeli and international activists who interject themselves temporarily into the local sphere of civil resistance in a Palestinian village. Here, solidarity activists form a highly diverse and shifting assemblage of actors who divide among themselves according to power-related ascriptions and privileges. As in a musical orchestra, individual activists and groups of activists each follow their own “score,” but align their distinct functions with one another to wage a struggle collectively. Within this orchestra of civil resistance, diversity is not the obstacle to collective action but its very basis.

Questions of identification have become complex and challenging to address as diversity is no longer believed to be adequately explained through ethnicity or multiculturalism alone.

Instead, the concept involves many other variables of similarity and difference.¹ Identities thus need to be explored through their multiplicities, relations, and their constant reconfigurations within structures of power.² Examining the relationship between identity and power means putting aside static ideas about ethnic, national, or cultural *entities* to focus on relations instead.³ Within research on civil resistance, relationalities and diversity have often been sidelined or subsumed under notions of collective identity or so-called movement frames, leaving the often complex dynamics of belonging and identification within such movements largely unexplored. Instead, the bulk of recent studies focus on theory about how and why nonviolent action sometimes works and sometimes fails.⁴

Discussing civil resistance as an arena in which fluctuating diversity and power-related characteristics determine patterns of identification, this article looks at Israeli and international activists who interject themselves temporarily into a local sphere of action in

support of local civil resistance in a Palestinian village. Here, fluctuations among activists and high internal diversity allow for complex dynamics of identification between activists and groups of activists, as well as between the individual activist and the “movement.” Such fluctuating diversity sets limits on collective identification and simultaneously creates strong identifications on multiple levels.

Civil resistance always involves multiple sources of cultural discourses competing to inform the everyday actions of participants, demanding the ethnographic study of place-based actors.⁵ Within this multi-levelled field of identification, privilege becomes the basis for the division of roles and functions among individuals within an assemblage similar to a musical orchestra, in which every musician plays his own score but aligns this unique function with other instrumentalists based on an agreed-upon composition. Within an *orchestra of civil resistance*, diversity is not the obstacle to collective action but becomes its very basis.

Diversity has historically been anthropology’s “business,”⁶ and was largely absent from the growing scholarship on civil resistance and nonviolent action, scholars of which have often researched the same ontological phenomena but based their ideas on different assumptions about political action, strategy, context, and the relationship between means and ends.⁷ On the other hand, anthropologists doing long-term fieldwork among civil resistance practitioners often lacked the analytical frameworks developed by the emerging field of civil resistance studies. This paper combines ethnographic fieldwork with insights gained from civil resistance studies, thereby continuing a recent trend in this field to emphasize a stronger empirical and analytical perspective.⁸

The Local “Stage”

“Civil resistance,” “nonviolent resistance,” and “nonviolent struggle” often refer to the same phenomenon, defined by Bartkowski⁹ as a form of political conflict in which ordinary people choose to stand up to oppressive structures by using tactics of nonviolent action. It is a story about common citizens who are drawn into great causes from the ground up.¹⁰ The ethnographic research behind this article was conducted in 2009 among civil resistance practitioners connected to the Palestinian village of Bil’in, a small agricultural settlement of roughly 1,800 inhabitants northwest of Ramallah in the West Bank. Located about 2.5 kilometers east of the Green Line,¹¹ Bil’in has gained prominence for holding sustained weekly protests. It is also the focus of the documentary film *Five Broken Cameras*, which was nominated for an Oscar in 2013.

The regular weekly demonstrations began in January 2005 and protested against the construction of Jewish settlements and the Israeli Separation Barrier on villagers’ land. The Barrier threatened the livelihood of Bil’in, cut villagers off from about fifty to sixty percent of their lands and prevented their access to olive trees, the mainstay of the Palestinian rural economy.¹² In response, Bil’in’s residents organized a popular committee with members of diverse political streams.¹³ The number of villagers participating in this popular resistance increased dramatically in 2006, following media coverage and legal measures taken by villagers and their Israeli supporters. Some success came when the Israeli Supreme Court asked the state to reroute the Separation Barrier around Bil’in¹⁴ on September 4, 2007.¹⁵ But it took until 2011 for bulldozers to begin dismantling the barrier from its previous route. Most of the previously separated land was eventually handed back to the villagers, but despite these changes, demonstrations in Bil’in have not ceased.

On an organizational level, the sustained struggle benefited from four factors: the close relationship between the local popular committee and the village community; successful trust-building and shared decision-making between Israelis, Palestinians and Internationals; the creativity of the demonstrations, and the fact that Bil'in was easily accessible for cross-border activists coming from Jerusalem or Tel Aviv.¹⁶

The period of my fieldwork in Bil'in was one of high tension because the Israeli army had just begun nightly arrest-raids in the village, triggering a permanent, twenty-four hour presence of international activists and the increased support of Israelis. I was embedded in various activist circles throughout my ethnographic research, which focused on a set of specific role-understandings and senses of identification that the international and Israeli activists developed throughout their assignments on the ground. Although specifically interested in the role of such cross-border activism in the village of Bil'in, this research was also multi-sited and involved various locations in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and in Israel. While some of the data is based on semi-structured interviews, most of my material emerged from ethnographic research that included observations, participation, and immersion in the field. This involved repeated conversations, as well as experiencing the daily routine of international and Israeli activists on the ground.

Also important was participation in concrete actions, such as protests and night-patrols, requiring of the ethnographer a difficult balancing act between immersion and involvement on the one hand, and moderation and safety on the other. One night in Bil'in, I was awakened from my mattress in the activists' apartment by a local coordinator shouting "Wake-up, wake-up, army is on the way!" The activists got dressed quickly, took their flashlights, put on scarves to protect against tear-gas, collected their cameras and phones, and wrote a lawyer's phone number on their arm in case of an arrest. "Are you coming?" the

coordinator turned to me. “Surely,” I said, while in fact hesitating in anticipation of what was about to happen. As often as possible I would join such actions while simultaneously setting my own limits, for detention could have quickly led to the end of my research. Like the activists themselves, I was consciously “managing dangers” throughout my stay.¹⁷

Palestinian civil resistance and third-party intervention

Civil resistance in Palestine has a long history that stems from the colonial interventions of the early twentieth century, including the British Lord Balfour’s promise to restore the Land of Israel.¹⁸ Palestinian strategies of protest came into full force in 1923 after the British Mandate was formally established and included political entreaties, demonstrations, strikes, and ultimately armed rebellion.¹⁹ Through most of the 1920s, Arab elites led Palestinian resistance, often competing with each other. The resisters often saw parallel or subsequent eruptions of violence, as was the case in the Uprisings of 1929, during which hundreds of Jews and Palestinians were killed and wounded.²⁰ Specifically noteworthy is the general strike held during the Great Revolt of 1936, which marked the last period of coherent and well-planned nonviolent civil resistance until the 1987 Intifada. An effective institutional framework of committees devised strategies and directives during this strike.²¹ These committees hoped to bring economic activity to a standstill, halt Jewish immigration, impose restrictions on land sales to Jews, and establish a national government accountable to a representative council—in other words, they sought to form the basis for an independent Palestinian state. The strike lasted 174 days and ended without direct achievements, thus creating a vacuum for a more violent rebellion to erupt, which was eventually crushed by the British.²²

Great Britain handed Palestine’s mandate over to the United Nations in 1947, when UN Resolution 181 supported the partition of Palestine, recommending that fifty-six percent of

the land was to be allocated to the Zionists.²³ It is noteworthy that by this time there were 600,000 Jews and 1.3 million Palestinians in Palestine. Jews owned only seven percent of the land.²⁴ After the Arab-Israeli War and the subsequent creation of the State of Israel, almost eighty percent of Palestine came under Israeli control. By January 1950, approximately 750,000 Palestinians became refugees and were not allowed to return.²⁵ Thus, the war that led to Israel's de facto independence also caused the Palestinian "catastrophe" of 1948, the "Nakba." In the decades following Israel's establishment, armed struggle became the universally accepted strategy within Fatah (formed in 1958) and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and non-violent action became sidelined.²⁶ When Israel emerged as the victor from another war in June 1967 against Egypt, Jordan and Syria within "six days," it established control over Sinai, the Golan Heights, Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, 1.1 million Palestinians came under Israeli authority.²⁷

It was from this increasingly entrenched Israeli military regime of control that coherent civil resistance re-emerged in the form of the First Intifada in 1987 – "an incipient nonviolent mass movement" with the goal of ending the Israeli occupation.²⁸ Palestinians in the movement took part in street demonstrations, the illegal display of nationalist symbols, graffiti, and defiance of soldiers on the streets. Youths erected barricades while merchants carried out commercial strikes by shutting the doors on designated day and time, "synchronizing their rhythm of life with the uprising."²⁹ As a "veritable Palestinian identity" emerged in the public, power had already been transferred from guerrillas and militias to the Palestinian people themselves.³⁰

The success of civil resistance depended upon a vast infrastructure that included effective decision-making committees, planning, and training, as Faisal Husseini advocated in

lectures on nonviolence in 1968. His organizing work in the territories led to the formation of the Committee Against the Iron Fist thirteen years later, and facilitated joint campaigning with Israeli groups in support of imprisoned Palestinians. While individual activists played the primary role in spreading nonviolent methods in the years before the Intifada,³¹ a joint Palestinian-Israeli movement developed in the years that followed.³² Israeli peace groups soon proliferated and some forty percent of all Israeli solidarity activity in the Intifada came from newly formed organizations.³³

As the Intifada led to the Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995, acts of civil resistance remained minor. Israel and the newly formed Palestinian Authority contained most such acts between 1993 and 1999.³⁴ The diplomatic bubble soon burst when, instead of redressing the power asymmetries in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship, the Oslo process facilitated their continuation. Even today, Israel's unchallenged and strengthened domination of Palestinian life is remembered as a key feature of this period.³⁵ The end of the "hopeful years" was marked by the eruption of the Second Intifada in September 2000, bringing a radical shift towards violence. Public participation decreased and international and Israeli solidarity activity also diminished significantly.³⁶

Israel's system of military control and separation tightened during and after the Second Intifada. The construction of the Separation Barrier became the landmark symbol of this trend, along with its disastrous humanitarian consequences for the Palestinian population.³⁷ As Maia Carter Hallward suggests, such separation and control mechanisms operated through a principle of territoriality that Israel inscribed into the landscape, the "infrastructure of separation," and into a differentiated legal system. Thus, the bounding of territory had not only an impact on the local population, but also influenced the possibilities for cross-border activism.³⁸

Nevertheless, and possibly precisely because of these developments, organized civil resistance re-emerged with the local struggles of villages such as Bil'in. These struggles garnered the support of international solidarity networks that had not been evident in the past and contributed to a dramatic increase of popular resistance in the absence of effective inter-state initiatives.³⁹ The first community to mount such a struggle was Budrus, a small farming village of 1,600 people that faced the threat of being cut off from its farmland by the Separation Barrier. Legal remedies followed protests that began there in November 2003, eventually compelling Israel to move the route of the Barrier in 2004. Just one month later, however, another two hundred dunams (forty acres) were taken away from the villagers. Protests erupted again, and were met with repressive measures from Israel that resulted in the death of a seventeen year-old by a rubber bullet, three hundred injured, and forty-five arrested.⁴⁰ The "Intifada against the wall" was born from this violence, and activists sustained the protests despite the frequent casualties. The movement spread to other villages, drew support from cross-border activists, and benefitted from effective local organizing.

Continuing the struggle

This paper focuses on international and Israeli activists and their unique roles within the wider *orchestra* of civil resistance. However, this role is rooted in the local context of this struggle and the need for external support that arose from it. Among the Palestinian activists in villages' local resistance committees were many who had taken part in the first Intifada. One of them was Iyad Burnat, a leading activist in the popular committee of Bil'in. Like many others he was arrested in 1990, at the age of seventeen, for allegedly throwing stones at Israeli soldiers, saying: "My life started in jail, no problem for me. But what we struggle for now is the future, it's about our children."⁴¹ Over the years, suppression and resistance to it has become deeply inscribed into the lives of Palestinian activists in Bil'in. Unlike international

and Israeli activists who show solidarity out of choice, the local Palestinian population wages an existential struggle to reclaim agricultural land and secure their future. Burnat said, “They took our land and our olive trees. Most of the people in Bil’in are farmers.” In response, the community “started a nonviolent demonstration against the wall and the settlements because it threatened our life. We eat from this land and it is the future of our children.”⁴² It becomes clear that land is not just a political question in the West Bank. Retaining ties to farmland is also central to rural Palestinian culture, presenting yet another struggle that flows from the endangered status of the Palestinian nation and its confrontation with settler colonialism.⁴³ Among Palestinians in Bil’in, I noticed a strong connection between the local impact of the Israeli occupation and their land-related reflections upon the past, present and future. Sustaining civil resistance was, in part, an expression of the desire to regain ownership of time *and* land for future generations.

This became clear when Abdallah Abu Rahme, another leading activist in Bil’in, gave me a ride back to Ramallah one night. I was in the back seat with his two young daughters and somehow our conversation turned to the topic of their favorite brand of ice cream. When I asked them if they liked Magnum ice-cream, their father chipped in angrily. “No, we are not eating Magnum, right? It is produced in Israel, and we don’t buy products from Israel.” Involving children in the local culture of resistance, whether in protests or through teaching, effectively passed on the values and principles to the next generation and helped them to comprehend their circumstances.

Practicing civil resistance in Bil’in also included maintaining awareness of the need for “continuing the struggle,”—which became a goal in itself. The aid of external supporters was vital to achieving this aim. Burnat explained, “In the beginning, Israeli soldiers started to shoot live bullets at Palestinian demonstrators. But when the Israeli [soldiers] see

internationals, Israelis, and cameras in the demonstrations, they change. A second thing is that internationals are our messenger in the world. He is coming here and goes back and tells his friends and organizations, and the Israelis spread the message inside Israel.⁴⁴

International and Israeli activists thus fulfilled very particular functions within the orchestra of civil resistance in Bil'in. Most activists emphasized that this orchestra was playing in support of local activists who coordinated with international and Israeli solidarity groups. However, one also noticed occasional dissonance between the strategic goals of the orchestra, the role of external supporters, and the opinions of the local Palestinian population. This became evident during one of my frequent journeys from Ramallah to Bil'in in a shared taxi, when a villager confronted me with his disapproval of the presence of foreigners. To him, it was inappropriate that women and men mixed, and even slept in the same apartment. "Do you believe in Allah?" he asked. "If not, you may all end up in hell."

The constant influx of Israeli and foreign activists to Bil'in also bred gossip. In the eyes of one Palestinian who studied in Ramallah at the time, Israeli and international activists were "homeless people without any perspective in their life," or "activist-tourists." Particularly striking was the widely held belief that activists introduced sexually transmitted infections to the villages they supported. Some believed that AIDS was extremely widespread in the village because of cross-border activism. Palestinians expressed similar discontent on several other occasions. One frequent comment, for instance, was that organizers in the village were profiteering from the foreign activists.

Despite this dissonance, most of the villagers I met in the course of my ethnographic fieldwork in Bil'in were supportive of the struggle and welcomed foreign activists precisely because they were able to fulfill the functions that were believed to benefit the sustainability of the local struggle. The different privileges that made civil resistance sustainable also

enabled the circulation of specific meanings and role-understandings through collective action, thereby shaping the different senses of identification that activists held in a context of high diversity and fluctuation.

The Internationals

Most internationals are citizens of the industrialized Western world who support Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation by drawing on their privileges of mobility and citizenship, including low vulnerability to Israeli military prosecution. The Palestinians in Bil'in were subject to Israeli military law, which allowed arbitrary detentions and suppression of activists. Internationals then complemented the agency of the local population, defined here broadly as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act."⁴⁵ This also includes the differential capacity of people to be mobile across borders and divisions. The support of internationals took place under the umbrella of organizations like the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), which seeks to provide protection and witness through the physical presence of foreigners.⁴⁶ Founded by Palestinian, Israeli and international activists in 2001, ISM defines itself as a Palestinian-led movement committed to employing techniques of nonviolent direct action to resist the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands.⁴⁷ As a "third party," internationals are defined by their initial non-involvement in the conflict and usually take up assignments for short periods of time. According to Veronique Dudouet, ISM fulfils three main functions: protection through accompaniment and bearing witness; global attention and solidarity; and empowering of Palestinians.⁴⁸ People interested in volunteering with ISM usually get in contact with a support group in their country, many of which offer preparatory trainings in addition to the compulsory training held by ISM in Ramallah. A minimum commitment of two weeks is required and future activists need to commit to the group's three principles of being Palestinian-led, nonviolent, and consensus-based in decision making.⁴⁹

One of the internationals in Bil'in was a Jewish-American called Iyan, who said of his motivations for joining ISM:

Being here is important, but not necessarily because you see a visible difference between one demonstration and the next. ...But because you are continuing the struggle and this is visible.... It gives hope to Palestinians when they see internationals and Israelis coming to their villages to demonstrations, putting their bodies in the way, catching up with tear-gas, just like the Palestinians.⁵⁰

In order to “continue the struggle” and to make it “visible” internationals in Bil'in draw on their privileges to perform specific functions, such as interposing their bodies between the Israeli army and wanted Palestinians during arrest operations (“de-arresting”). But where shared privileges among internationals end, diversity begins. For instance Iyan, a Jewish American activist, emphasized the unique role he could play in disrupting the idea that “the Jews are doing it” (the occupation). Iyan was different in many ways from other internationals, but was notably similar where privileges were concerned. Within this specific world of activism, his individuality became subsumed under the umbrella “international,” while his identification with the struggle remained essentially *different*. This difference, however, was as much a facilitator of collective action as were the views and goals shared by all activists.

Another activist in Bil'in was Fergus from the United Kingdom, who joined ISM after graduating from law school. One of the reasons he joined ISM was that it was willing to take people for short periods of time with little experience. What counted was not knowledge or experience, but the right citizenship and body – an international, Western body and its implicit privileges. However, “no ISM-activist is going to stop the Israelis [from] at some

point bulldozing the house if they want to,” said Fergus, adding that activists had an impact on the struggle merely by being physically present.⁵¹

One of the older activists in Bil’in was Rick, a Unitarian Minister from California. He had been active on the ground for about four weeks before coming to Bil’in. Initially he was convinced by a female rabbi in the United States, who influenced his opinion with a presentation about her trip to the West Bank and Israel. Rick said that he “had the idea of doing a working vacation; instead of travelling, doing a vacation for some cause.”⁵² The phrase “working vacation” underlines how different some internationals’ identifications with the struggle are from those of Palestinian activists. Even within the sub-group of internationals, ideological ties were rather weak. Some volunteers pursued nonviolence as a way of life, while others may have come because out of a sense of responsibility to challenge Israeli policy as Jews, and others may have had completely different reasons.

The Israelis

During an interview in his house in Bil’in, the leading activist Abdallah Abu Rahme said that Palestinians and Israelis were “a good team,” adding that “in the past, no Israeli could ever have stayed here. Now, we let them stay, sleep and eat in our houses.”⁵³ Collective action takes place not only despite, but *because* of a strong underlying Otherness and power-difference. Israeli activists who supported local Palestinian civil resistance did so as citizens of the very state that occupied Palestinian territory. And yet one may call this cooperation a “joint” Palestinian-Israeli struggle that happened despite the risk of being seen as a “traitor” to one’s national cause, or as a “collaborator” with the enemy.⁵⁴ Crossing over for Israeli activists implied breaking through the infrastructure and images of separation, which are not only restricting Palestinians’ movement but also keep Israelis and Palestinians apart.⁵⁵ Such joint action provides the means to challenge the power held by the occupying force in the

West Bank because it challenges its moral authority and policies in various ways, including through legal actions, advocacy, and coordinated direct action.

Most Israeli activists included in this research were connected to the group Anarchists Against the Wall (AATW), which was formed in 2003 as a response to the construction of the Israeli Separation Barrier. The AATW considers it a “duty of Israeli citizens to resist immoral policies and actions carried out in our name.”⁵⁶ These Israeli activists crossed geographical, social and political borders in their support of Palestinians, a process that often involved breaking away from certain forms of collective belonging to the nation of Israel. One of the crucial events in this transformation is often the first protest with Palestinians. “In one day my life changed. I had tears in my eyes. Now we are the traitors in Israel, we are against the country,” said the Israeli activist Keren from AATW about her first protest in 2005, the year she joined the movement, adding: “Separation is an Israeli strategy. Breaking these borders is part of our strategy. The other is stopping the occupation. I don’t say we will change reality by demonstrating. But breaking the borders Israel creates and raising awareness within Israel through demonstrations and direct actions is our impact.”⁵⁷ Another Israeli activist named Dan said of his first protest against the Separation Barrier, “Being told by the police not to walk and walking; not physically fighting them, but it broke something in me and I physically felt it in my consciousness. I had this understanding of culture, the law, the thing that I was belonging to and then I broke from it.”⁵⁸

Israeli activists cut into the neat narratives that took separation for granted and cast the Palestinian as the ultimate national Other. Joining the movement of the Other became part of Israeli activists’ own struggle, as some core aspects of their national “we” symbolized heavy baggage they sometimes wished to unload. For “crossing over,” and for refusing the army draft, Israeli activists also paid a high price. Sahar Vardi, a prominent Israeli activist from

Jerusalem who had been active in Bil'in, refused military service and went to prison at a young age, when all her friends joined the army. "We became totally different," she said.⁵⁹ "Our lives were no longer the same." Like internationals, Israeli activists aimed to protect the Palestinian population with their physical presence and direct actions. Their advocacy, however, was a form of "ambassadorship," as one activist put it. They hoped to change how they were perceived by Palestinians and internationals, showing that some Israelis adopt alternative pathways.

Identification and privilege

The organized and defiant actions of unarmed people have informed an understanding of political power outside of the state, challenging Weberian ideas of top-down, centralized, static, material, and elite or institution-centric political authority.⁶⁰ Despite the violent and powerful interventions by the Israeli state, civil resistance is sustained with the support of organizations that protect and nurture local nonviolent movements, most of which have only developed in the past two decades.⁶¹ These cross-border interventions of grassroots activists aimed to prevent or halt violence and facilitate social change for the benefit of ordinary people.⁶² This may involve international campaigns, mobilization actions, nonviolent accompaniment, and nonviolent interposition, according to Dudouet.⁶³ The fluctuating inflows and outflows of activists produce a confluence of different cultural and ideological backgrounds in the same landscape of action within which different actors spread their senses of self.⁶⁴ In a transnationally connected field of local civil resistance with a steady inflow of activists across borders, diversity becomes part of the architecture of contemporary civil resistance and a resource for the mobilization of power, particularly in spaces of action that are home to high fluctuation.

Here solidarity activists capitalize on their distinct inventories of power and privilege as citizens of influential states to gain access.⁶⁵ One of these privileges is transnational mobility, a scarce global resource that is unequally distributed.⁶⁶ However, solidarity activists' privileges also depend upon the efforts of the state of Israel to restrict them. This is evident in the interrogation techniques of airport securities designed to screen foreigners travelling to Israel for their intentions, sometimes denying them entry. But internationals have adapted, too: one Danish citizen changed his name after being blacklisted, re-entered Israel with a new passport bearing his new name.⁶⁷

Israeli and international activists performed power-related functions that Palestinian villagers could not fulfill. Moreover, they contributed to forms of identification that were as much constructed in relation to mobility and privilege as they were in connection to place.⁶⁸ Such transnational movement not only redrew boundaries and reconfigured identification; it also created new boundaries and raised barriers that restricted collective identification.⁶⁹ Consequently, the cross-identifications between activists and groups of activists are best explored as a continuously emerging relationship between the individual and the "whole."⁷⁰ In the case of Bil'in, the inflows and outflows of international and Israeli activists for what were often very short periods of time set limits to collective identification while opening new possibilities of dynamic identifications on multiple levels.

Internationals formed a distinct group based on nothing more but their shared privilege and common vision. One such international activist, the Jewish American Iyan, said about his privilege: "If I get arrested, I go to jail for a day whereas the Palestinians go to jail for six months, up to years. I know that I have a personal privilege and I accept that."⁷¹ Israeli and international activists also enjoyed legal privileges in an Israeli system of occupation that subjected Palestinian activists to military courts, administrative detention, and punishments

levied against entire villages such as road closures and curfews for their participation in demonstrations.⁷² The privileges shared among internationals commingled to become context-sensitive, fluctuating “collectives” capable of figuring and refiguring boundaries between individuals and sub-groups.

These capabilities did not mitigate every challenge in developing and maintaining relationships across lines of identity, experience, and relative degree of rootedness in the community. Marianne became active with the ISM after postgraduate education in the United States, not least because ISM had no Arabic language requirements. She had been in the village for three months at the time I met her. Having stayed longer than most other internationals, Marianne identified more closely with local Palestinians than with other internationals, saying: “I think that I can’t leave people here alone. Maybe that’s not that good after all.”⁷³ Despite her deep identification with the villagers, Marianne was troubled by her inability to speak Arabic with the local women. Speaking English with internationals was easier but the short duration of any individual activist’s presence made any sense of community difficult. As a temporary coordinator for internationals in Bil’in Marianne had seen a lot of activists coming and going: “Good is when people come who stay longer. But those who come and stay for a few days make any continuity impossible. The relationships between us become problematic.”⁷⁴ She further said that above all it was the “common goal” that held everyone together, suggesting that different activists stay aligned by a shared understanding of and commitment to their objectives, even when their mutual identifications were not always that clear. At the same time the relationship to local Palestinians remains one that also operated across senses of mutual distinction, whether in terms of privilege or lifestyle.

The integrative potential of nonviolent civil resistance as discussed by Smithey is one that took place *across* difference in Bil'in.⁷⁵ The differently situated actors continuously negotiated the social, cultural, and political meanings of their joint enterprise.⁷⁶ A new context-dependent identity emerged that encompassed multidimensional and fluid subjectivities.⁷⁷ It included relations of power that were ascribed by the activists themselves, and at times by others. These subjectivities were inextricably bound to activists' distinct capacities to act, which established lines of demarcation (usually flexible) between activists according to roles, functions and affiliations. A person's or group's capacity to oppose, appropriate, and execute sociocultural mediated power formed the basis for shifting perceptions of similarity and difference.⁷⁸

Fergus the international from Britain, deliberately tried not to over-identify with Palestinians, saying: I don't feel particularly connected. (...) I don't think you come to work with ISM to become part of the community. It is certainly best not to become too emotionally involved because part of the role of Internationals is observer, an active participant. There is a danger, I feel, to identify too closely.⁷⁹ Before coming to Bil'in, Fergus had been active in another village where ISM activists were assigned to protect local shepherds from military violence. He recalled one day when, soldiers were sitting and having tea with the shepherds instead of telling them to dissolve. To Fergus, "This was a real situation where I actually felt like a massive outsider because the shepherds and the soldiers were laughing and talking to each other in a mix of Hebrew and Arabic. I was sitting alone with another English-speaker and we were constantly left out of the joke."⁸⁰ It was disorienting for a short-term activist to see Israeli soldiers having tea and making jokes with Palestinian shepherds. Solidarity of internationals in such situations became deeply functional, with a deeper sense of immersion

restricted by the many gaps that separated internationals, Israelis and Palestinians in this fluctuating context.

An orchestra of civil resistance

One way to grasp this dynamic relationship between collective action and individual identification is to return to the metaphor of a musical orchestra described in the introduction.⁸¹ The performance, while dependent on the unique contributions of each musician is, in fact, “the combination of such tunes, in their mutual relations, and in the way particular patterns of sound are transformed into different but related shapes.”⁸² Similarly, Israeli, Palestinian and international activists “perform” an orchestra of civil resistance composed of numerous interdependent functions assigned to individuals on the basis of perceived *roles*. Such roles may change over the course of action but remain connected to previous agreements over each party’s role in the struggle—or, to extend the metaphor, the *compositios*. Moreover, civil resistance communicates to *audiences*. The target audience for a civil resistance movement must present their action as a fully coordinated effort, and not an agglomeration of “solo acts.” Behind this performance, the complex dynamics between individuals of distinct and intersecting identities are always at play, just as they are when musicians conduct rehearsals or take their seats in the concert hall. The nuances of each individual instrument and the category of instruments it belongs to become meaningful; their varied contributions to the “the common goal” of the performance simultaneously form internal differences and facilitate collective alignment.

The different groups of activists in Bil’in forged bonds of respect and trust, which in turn enabled each party to exert power with whatever leverage it had. While Israelis had the power to confront Israeli soldiers and bring legal cases to the Israeli court system, Palestinians had the power to set the course of action and restrain stone throwing, or to decide when to

invite Israeli activists to participate,.⁸³ The internationals, for their part, could stay on the ground for longer periods and live among villagers day and night. Thus, an orchestra of civil resistance does not have one single conductor, but operates through multiple layers of decision making on the ground and in meetings. Above all, Israeli and international solidarity groups emphasized that Palestinians are the ones who retained ownership over the course of their struggle.

The strength of the activists' alignment with the "common goal" of the political performance may at times be enough to resolve all of the tensions between the "orchestra of civil resistance" and the ambitions of an individual "instrumentalist," or between different groups of "instrumentalists." However, Rick, the Unitarian minister, experienced a conflict of identification that illustrates this. Considering himself to be a third-party, he wanted to meet the "other side" of the conflict. He recounted:

Soldiers asked me "who are you" and stuff. We had this extended conversation where I learned a lot and hopefully moved their hearts and minds a bit. Down in the village the other ISM person asked, where was I? I said that I was going up and met those soldiers. Anyway, the shit hit the fan. 'Wait a minute, you are ISM, you can't be engaging with the enemy', he said. 'They are the enemy, we are there for Palestinians'.'⁸⁴

A similar conflict emerged when he hitchhiked from the Palestinian village to an Israeli settlement where he met local residents. Moving across the divide was viewed with suspicion because the hegemonic frame of internationals' roles understood privilege as a resource to be used for the protection and support of Palestinian civil resistance only. In this instance, the dynamic relationship between individual and collective identification was affected by Rick's actions, which were possible because of his privileged ability to cross borders.

Scholars have described nonviolent resistance and its dual processes of dialogue and action as an integral part of conflict transformation.⁸⁵ However, the experience of this American activist suggests that internationals' roles are frequently conceptualized more narrowly than some individuals' self-perceptions and their unique capacities indicate. Indeed, one can protest, resist, accommodate, accept, and ignore all at the same time, which is why power relationships are viewed most clearly as continual negotiation and struggle.⁸⁶ In one brief comment, Rick distanced himself from Palestinian "culture," saying, "I am going against my own culture here."⁸⁷ While ideologically opposed to the Israeli occupation, he identified more closely with Israeli society.⁸⁸ As individual activists constantly evaluate their relationship to collectively mediated senses of belonging, their cultural identities are constructed and re-constructed "through a dialogue across difference."⁸⁹ Difference may restrict collective identification, but the same privilege that produces differentiation and fluctuation is also the very basis for sustained collective action.

Similarly, the diverse functions and mutual identifications of international and Israeli activists convey strong senses of alterity despite their agreement over political objectives. Based on assessments of relative privilege, roles are divided and, with them, some aspects of mutual identification. While Israeli activists said that they could not act beyond the bounds of their entanglements with the Israeli state, internationals could stay with Palestinians in the occupied territories for longer periods. Israeli activist Sahar explained: "We go to demonstrations and we must go home afterwards. The internationals first of all have the role of being there to help. They have the power. They can stay there in the ISM-house. We can't do that. We slept there, a few nights here a few nights there. We can't really live there. We have jobs and school and so. The internationals can. They can leave it all behind them."⁹⁰

Whether they “have jobs” or not, internationals can stay in Palestinian villages more continuously which constitutes privilege in relation to Israelis. Israeli activists, for their part, often said that internationals, as outsiders, lacked sensitivity and knowledge about the conflict. They also blamed the internationals for their antagonism against Israel. Dan, an Israeli activist, described the internationals as “kids with little understanding, with a lot of hatred towards Israel, with emotional views; it is what they do at that age.”⁹¹ Sahar noted that “even Palestinians are sometimes more tolerant towards Israel than internationals.”⁹² One day she walked with internationals through Jerusalem, where they entered an Ultra-orthodox Jewish neighborhood “dressed inappropriately and smoking,” despite her asking them not to. “I thought they respect one community but were unable to respect another,” she said.⁹³ The Israeli activists’ self-image as supporters of Palestinian resistance grew out of their affiliation with Israel, which sometimes clashed with the internationals’ opposition towards Israel, limiting mutual identifications. However, Israelis were considered “more powerful” by internationals, who saw them confronting soldiers in their own language and living in Israel, hence believing that only they could influence it’s society from within.

Israeli activists’ interactions with Palestinians would usually take place in Hebrew, the “tongue of the occupier.” The Israeli activist Dan remembered one of his visits to Bil’in, when a child started to cry after he spoke in Hebrew on the street. Another Israeli activist expressed her feelings of guilt about being an Israeli citizen and a taxpayer to the occupation. This guilt represented one of the uncomfortable aspects of Israeli belonging. But Israeli activists went beyond that by constantly re-inventing their individual relation to Israel and to the Palestinian people, partly breaking with old senses of belonging and adopting new ones.

Regardless of identity, each individual activist straddles identification across three dimensions: one representing the specific group of activists to which s/he belongs; the

individual level of identity which incorporates, appropriates or challenges aspects of the former depending on context; and the relationship to the whole—the struggle or the “orchestra.”⁹⁴ The same activist on the frontline chanting slogans in unity with the movement can, among fellow activists in another setting, feel like an outsider—all within an effectively aligned orchestra on a single stage of civil resistance.

Compositions, roles and rituals of conflict

From the aggregate of various acts of communication emerges what we may call the *composition*: sets of symbols and imagery that influence how participants relate to themselves and to each other; preparatory trainings held for international activists, and weekly protests in the village. Symbols are “objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotions, and impel men to action.”⁹⁵ Symbols can create identifications as actors continually create, appropriate, and disseminate them locally and transnationally. When Palestinian activist Bassem Abu Rahmeh was killed in Bil’in by a tear-gas canister deployed at close range on April 17, 2009, he lived on as a defining symbol for civil resistance and injustice. Activists designed “Bassem” T-shirts, posters, and banners, and released a film about his life. “Bassem” was soon found everywhere in Bil’in, with one of the posters saying: “Goodbye Bassem, You were a friend to us all.”⁹⁶ The symbolic representation of the death of this unarmed man highlighted the opposition between a just and nonviolent movement against an unjust and violent aggressor, creating a centerpiece for affiliation and identification. Moreover, Bil’in itself became a symbol of popular resistance and steadfastness. According to Iyan, it “inspired a lot of people to come to Palestine and inspired me to come to Palestine.”⁹⁷

Indeed, many international activists came to support Palestinian resistance after hearing about the struggle or watching documentary films. As Arjun Appadurai noted in his

explanation of the ideoscape, the dynamic global flow of ideas, imagination has become a powerful form of “negotiation between sites of individual agency and global possibility.”⁹⁸ In the twenty-first century, many would-be travelers already virtually know their anticipated destinations through the widely circulating images—and imaginaries—circulating about them.⁹⁹ Moreover, the internationals often planned to share their experiences with people in their home countries, often appropriating local imagery of civil resistance to create transnational symbols of solidarity. This circulatory process was yet another that flowed into the creation of situational activist identification and co-identification with “others.”¹⁰⁰ Just as anthropologists translate local experiences into written texts in dominant global languages, so do international and Israeli activists take local grievances and translate them into the language that fits their transnational or national audiences.¹⁰¹ The continuous re-creation of symbolic imagery on the local stage of action is essential for maintaining the inflows and outflows of activists’ bodies and of the information they produce. This process, in turn, shaped a fluctuating population of activists and influenced how they situated their identities in relation to each other. Sustaining the local actions further impelled future supporters to take the “political stage” alongside the activists on the ground.

Bil’in’s main political “performance,” of both individuals and the collective, was the weekly protest in Bil’in. This regular “ritual of conflict” usually took place on Friday after the noon prayer and often involved international, Israeli and Palestinian activists, tourists, and journalists.¹⁰² The sequence of events often followed a similar and predictable pattern despite a variety of creative tactics to alter this repetition. As the crowd marched towards the Separation Barrier the Israeli soldiers already awaited them. “It’s like two sides are waiting for each other to play in some way. The Palestinians walk to the fence, the Israelis wait there, they know what they are doing,” said Iyan.¹⁰³ Internationals strategically employed their

privilege when Palestinians called on them to join the front line to protect them from live fire. Iyan said further, “It is very easy to tell who is on your side and who is against you in that situation. You march to a wall very peacefully and they shoot at you with tear gas, and they throw percussion grenades and shoot at you with chemical liquids. It’s like a war. It’s a war you know you are on the right side.”¹⁰⁴ The protests thus served as a site of an ongoing, intra-group performance made audible to an “outsider” target audience.

Fergus said of his experience in the weekly protest that in a situation of conflict without a perceivable end, the protest served as a weekly focal point that kept everyone together.¹⁰⁵ It unified the otherwise very diverse participants while communicating symbolically the common goals of the movement to the world outside. Like an orchestra, the weekly protest was a coordinated performance conveying that resistance is alive, transcendent, and widely supported. Moreover, the diversity of actors and the respective privileges of Israeli and international activists are effectively “making the protest a story,” as Israeli activist Sahar Vardi said.¹⁰⁶ The physical presence of people with privilege spurred more local action in the hope that their struggle would continue to compel more Western or Israeli activists to use their power to cross borders to join the movement—and to lead their privileges to the fulfillment of the common goal.

The regular collective actions were animated and informed by the activists’ co-identification across deep lines of differences. At the same time, the very differences that the activists bridged through a shared commitment to their common goal also formed the contours of their division into sub-groups based on functions. For international activists, the process of negotiating individual subjectivities with collective identification often began with the preparatory training, like the one I attended as an observer. Such trainings have always been important in strategic nonviolent resistance and were central components of many historical

campaigns. The training by ISM was held inside a seminar room of a hotel in Ramallah, where a group of foreign activists started by talking about their hopes and fears in anticipation of the weeks that lay ahead of them. From there, the trainees engaged a process of consolidating their individual roles as parts of the larger orchestra of civil resistance. Before taking direct action, the trainers socialized the newcomers into an individualized understanding of what it would mean for that person to be an international. The training presented each trainee with the central aspects of their roles, some of which ISM suggested based on each individual's distinct privileges. Before entering the field as full-fledged solidarity activists, the would-be internationals had to demonstrate that they agreed with, and were knowledgeable about the principles and realities that legitimated and defined their involvement. However, for many it was the first visit to the region and much of what they began to see as their primary role depended heavily on the distinct way trainers framed their future actions.

The presence of cross-border training in nonviolent resistance could lead one to assume that local movements are fully indigenous, relying solely on methods and tactics that have emerged organically within their own situation. While this is the case, it is also true that activists employ analytical and strategic tools transferred from outside.¹⁰⁷ ISM trainers taught behavioral rules with respect to local culture (such as proscriptions against alcohol use or kissing in public), alongside more globally familiar principles of nonviolence and engagement. This training initiated the ongoing re-evaluation of the relationship between the individual activists' aims and the collective framing to which some of the interviewees above referred to in various ways. It also started the process of continually identifying (and re-identifying) their roles, their objectives, and their limits. As the activists interviewed for this study attest, this role-shaping process among internationals bred conflicts within and outside

of themselves, as the many components of the activists' collective identities harmonized and clashed as they were being formed and re-formed on a situational basis in the course of action.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Dynamics of identification in highly diverse and fluctuating settings of civil resistance are much more complex than the focus on a single *movement* as a container for collective identities would suggest. Using the orchestra of civil resistance as an analytical tool to make sense of how diversity and collective action interact, I explored individual identifications and shared senses of belonging and differing as well as their procedural production and reconfigurations. Identification is best seen here as dynamic ascriptions of roles on multiple levels in reference to privileges and functions, which in turn become the basis for specific processes of identification and differentiation. Diversity and fluctuation set the limits to collective identification and simultaneously creates new identifications on multiple levels, in different contexts, and through a variety of activities.

Temporary and fluctuating “collectives” are formed in this specific world of action based on perceived similarities and differences that may otherwise be absent. This is particularly clear among internationals: activists from the mostly Western world who are packed together because of their shared privileges. Israeli and international activists' mediated capacity to act influences how they relate to themselves and to each other in their various roles and functions. The effectiveness—and completeness—of the “division of labor” and their voluntary contribution of capacities and privileges makes collective action sustainable. As shared experiences are short-lived and collective actions intense, international, Israeli, and Palestinian activists engage in collective action not despite, but because they are essentially *different*. The Israeli and international supporters may strongly identify with the collective

struggle and the Palestinian people ideologically, but their relationship to each other and to the local Palestinians is defined by difference in many ways. But across the boundaries that mark these differences they also maintain mutual identifications to varying degrees.

This study shows that by shifting focus from “the movement” to the arena in which different actors interact to create and recreate complex, and often fragile, collective spheres of action casts light on how the often short-lived inflows and outflows of activists preserve and transform dynamics of identification within an orchestra of civil resistance. An orchestra’s very existence depends upon its ability to harmonize and coordinate diverse instrumental performances toward a complex, powerful sound that surpasses what soloist could achieve. The benefit of looking at this world of civil resistance through the prism of an “orchestra” lies in the combination of collective action and diversity. But one must also acknowledge that a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with this metaphor.¹⁰⁹ In this spirit, my humble hope is to have contributed to the understanding of civil resistance and its relationship with privilege and diversity, however, without suggesting a wholesale concept metaphor of any sort.

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